

Bell Urges Carter To Create a Panel On New FBI Chief

By Margaret Gentry
Associated Press

Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said yesterday he has taken the first steps toward finding a new FBI director by recommending that President Carter name a committee to screen possible applicants.

Bell said the current director, Clarence M. Kelley, has agreed to serve on the committee but the chairman and other members have not been chosen.

Bell also repeated an earlier statement that he is studying whether to break up the Drug Enforcement Administration and transfer much of the agency's work to the FBI and some of its functions to the Treasury Department.

And he told reporters that he will continue to give senators a major voice in choosing U.S. attorneys and district judges so long as their selections are qualified.

The Attorney General said he expects Carter to appoint the FBI selection committee soon. Bell said he has recommended that there be nine members from various parts of the country.

The committee would have 90 days or longer to screen candidates and submit potential nominees, Bell said. "They will bring us a list of the best available people."

The director must be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Bell said the Carter administration will allow the committee to decide for itself whether candidates should have a background of FBI work.

He said Kelley will remain with the FBI through October when he becomes eligible for higher pension benefits. But he indicated that Kelley might be replaced as director and assigned to an advisory role before then.

Bell also said he is committed to a merit selection process for appointing U.S. attorneys and federal judges but will continue to give Democratic senators a major voice in choosing them.

"This has always been a part of the

patronage system," he noted. "I don't want to come in and disrupt things. You can accomplish a lot of things without confrontation. I long do you think it would take to get judgeship vacancies filled if we disrupted the system?"

The Senate must confirm presidential nominations for judgeships and federal prosecutors.

Bell said he currently plans generally to accept persons recommended by the Democratic senators but insist that they be "as good or better than Republican appointees now holding the offices."

The Attorney General said he hoped to wind up the department investigation of FBI burglaries within 18 months. "I think it's gone on too long already. I'm pressing to bring it to conclusion," he said. "If we have heard something within 60 days, I'm going to be upset."

For the past year, the department's Civil Rights Division has been investigating whether to bring criminal charges against FBI employees involved in burglaries of the homes and offices of political activists during the past five years.

Bell said he also hoped the Justice Department probe of South Korean attempts to influence more than 20 members of Congress would be concluded soon. A federal grand jury here began hearing testimony last fall alleging that South Korean agents gave \$500,000 to \$1 million a year to the representatives in the early 1970s.

Certain aspects of the investigation may take a year or more to complete, according to sources close to the investigation. These sources say that Bell is not yet familiar with the scope of the investigation.

The head of the Drug Enforcement Administration acknowledged that he had discussed a shakeup of agency functions with Bell but said the process was still in the study stage.

"He said this is one of the items that deserves attention," said DEA Administrator Peter Bensinger. "I don't think he has concluded it would necessarily be better. What he said was let's take a look at it."